

File: FOIA

CIA Bill Hits the Hill

If there's any virtue in persistence, lobbyists for the Central Intelligence Agency are ready for canonization.

After five years of wrangling, the House of Representatives is scheduled to vote September 17 on a proposed law to exempt CIA operation files from the Freedom of Information Act.

The Senate passed a similar measure last year.

Rep. Ted Weiss (D-N.Y.), who is leading the opposition to the measure, convinced House Intelligence Committee Chairman Edward Boland (D-Mass.) to delay the vote, originally set for September 10.

Weiss' staff is organizing an *ad hoc* committee to oppose the new secrecy power for the CIA. He objects to giving CIA boss William Casey, who was President Reagan's 1980 campaign director, authority to designate which of his files would be exempt from release to reporters. The measure, H.R. 5164, would also discourage judicial review of documents the agency may withhold under the proposed exemption.

The Newspaper Guild, Society of Professional Journalists and Radio-Television News Directors are against the CIA-drafted legislation. "It's going to make it more difficult to get CIA documents," says the News Director's vice president Ernie Schultz. Retired CIA officer Ralph McGehee managed spy files and says the proposed law would hide

"some 80 to 90 percent of CIA files." He added that "major investigations of the CIA by Congress have been triggered by media exposés bared by information released under the FOIA."

In a move that raised eyebrows among liberals, the American Civil Liberties Union formally announced, on February 10, that it supported the measure. According to Morton Halperin, who helped negotiate differences with the CIA for the ACLU, the new act would actually produce more information from agency files by streamlining the release process. But dissent has erupted from chapters in California, and the ACLU's national board has directed its counsel to review the measure. ■

—Angus Mackenzie

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